

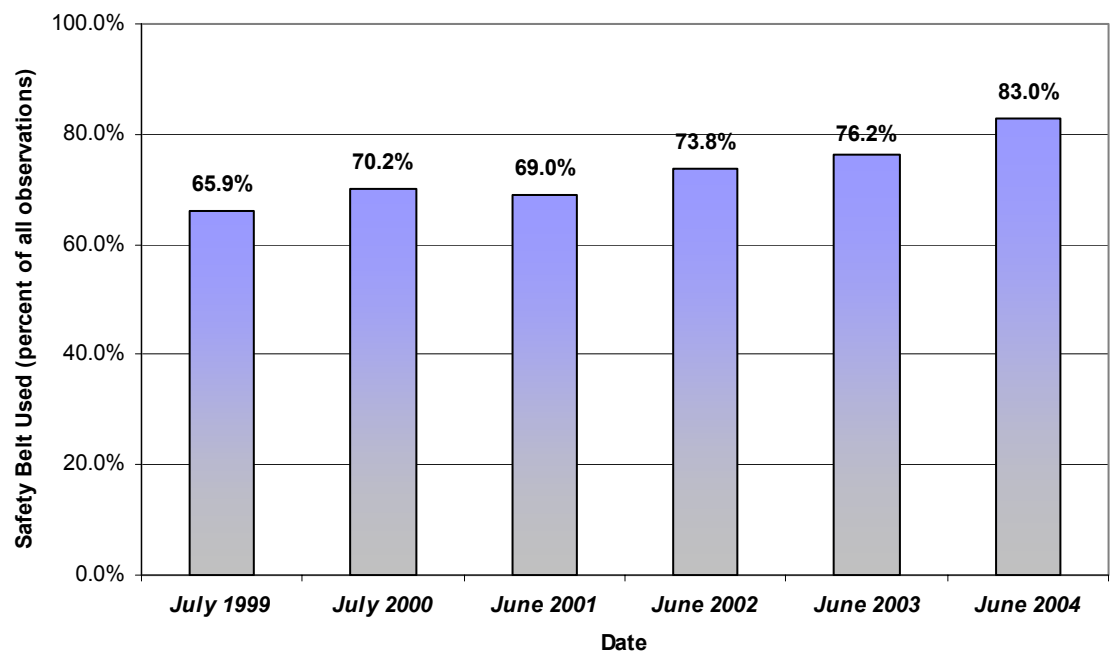
Safety Belts/Occupant Protection

Background

According to NHTSA, proper use of passenger restraints is the single most cost-effective and immediate means of reducing motor vehicle deaths and injuries. Drivers and occupants are becoming more aware of the importance of using safety belts, how to properly use them, and how to properly position children using safety restraints within air bag-equipped vehicles.

Safety belt usage in Illinois started increasing in the early 1990s but began leveling off and declining during the late 1990s. In July 2003, Governor Blagojevich signed the primary safety belt enforcement bill into law, making it possible for law enforcement to stop and ticket drivers based solely on a safety belt violation. Consequently, Illinois now has primary enforcement for the driver and front passenger, as well as an elevated child restraint requirement.

Figure 12. Illinois Observed Front Seat Safety Belt Usage



Source: Illinois Crash Facts & Statistics (2003)

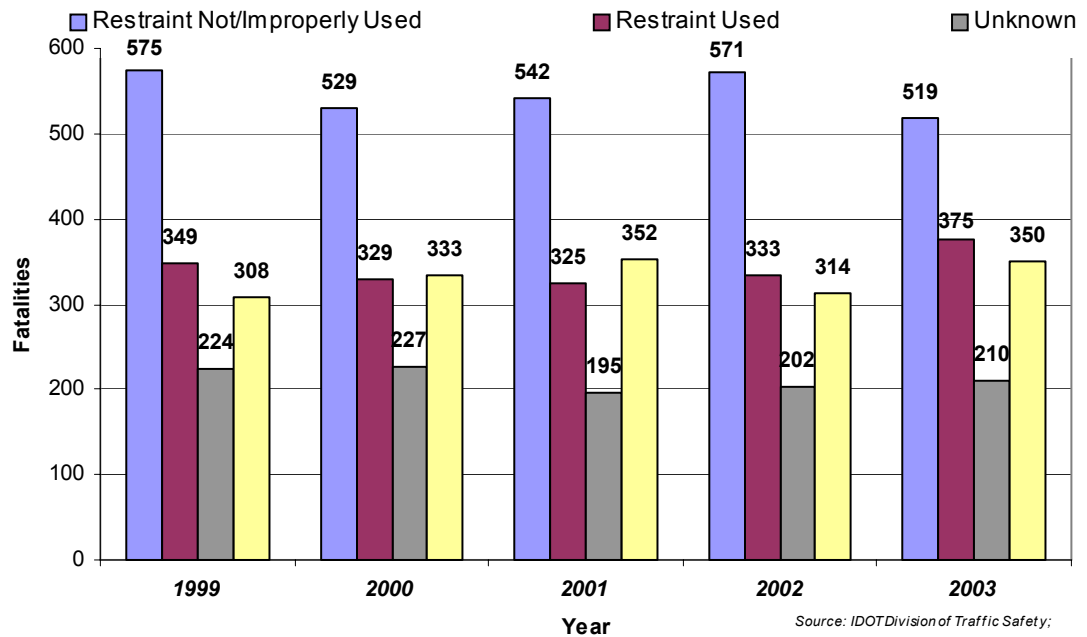
In fatal crashes where occupant restraint usage was reported, 48 percent of those killed were not wearing safety belts. The 2004 statewide safety belt usage rate rose from 76.2 percent to 83.0 percent. Refer to Figure 12. According to NHTSA, this increase translates into an estimated 90 lives saved and 2,791 injuries prevented. An overall increase in restraint usage, for both children and adults, will continue to decrease vehicular fatalities in Illinois. Public information and education campaigns, such as “Click It or Ticket,” have also increased awareness on the importance of safety belt usage throughout the state. Furthermore, the fine for a violation is \$25 plus a \$55 required bond.

State and national fatality and injury data show that men ages 16-34 are most likely to be involved in a crash and least likely to be wearing safety belts. This group, identified as “at-risk,” also engages in other high-risk driving behaviors such as speeding and reckless and impaired driving. Improving safety belt usage of this group will significantly decrease vehicular fatalities.

According to NHTSA, nearly 73 percent of child restraints are improperly used. Research on the effectiveness of child safety seats in passenger cars has found them to reduce fatal injuries for infants (children less than one-year-old) by 71 percent and by 54 percent for toddlers (children one- to four-years-old). For infants and toddlers placed in light trucks, the corresponding reductions are 58 percent and 59 percent, respectively.

On January 1, 2004, the Illinois Child Passenger Protections Act was amended to require that children under the age of eight must be secured in an appropriate child safety seat. A violation of the act is punishable by a fine of not more than \$50 waived upon proving possession of an appropriate child restraint system. A subsequent violation of this Act is punishable by a fine of not more than \$100.

Figure 13. Illinois Occupant Fatalities



* Vulnerable Users - Restraint usage not applicable to pedestrians, pedalcyclists, and motorcyclists.

Recent Implemented Strategies

- Identified and focused efforts on nonusers and part-time belt users.
- Supported public information and education campaigns, including earned and paid media.
- Increased high-visibility law enforcement efforts.
- Provided incentives to law enforcement for their efforts.
- Continued implementation of IDOT's Highway Safety Plan initiatives:
 - Funded Speeding and Traffic Accident Reduction (STAR) programs enabling Secretary of State Police to utilize roving patrols
 - Funded "Click It or Ticket" paid media and campaign efforts
 - Enabled purchasing of child safety seats and promotional material to demonstrate proper usage
 - Promoted Child Passenger Safety initiatives among small law enforcement agencies
 - Enabled increased ISP enforcement of occupant protection laws
 - Continued operation of child passenger safety resource centers
 - Revitalized "Saved by the Belt" program
 - Funded the Protectors Program
 - Provided hireback hours during enforcement campaign periods
 - Funded child safety seat technician training
 - Maintained five child safety seat installation check locations

Challenges

- Accurate crash reporting of restraint usage.
- Separation of not applicable and unknown usage on crash report.
- Limited public awareness of consequences of non-usage (i.e., fines, injury, death, etc.).
- Difficulty in reaching "at-risk" group (males ages 16-34).
- Limited personnel available to enforce occupant restraint laws.
- Difficulty in determining safety belt usage in moving vehicles.
- Racial profiling concerns.

Proposed Strategies

- Improve crash reporting accuracy.
- Increase fines for not using safety restraints.
- Aggressively enforce occupant restraint laws.
- Enhance "Safety Belt Enforcement" programs at the local level.
- Increase public awareness of consequences of non-usage (i.e., fines, injury, death, etc.).
- Provide safety belt/occupant protection literature to increase awareness via:
 - Safety partner facilities
 - Project public information meetings
- Educate parents and other caregivers on proper child restraint selection and installation.
- Identify and focus efforts on underserved and at-risk populations.
- Survey focus groups, such as by school district, age group, short distance travel, etc., on safety belt usage.

- Determine quantity of child safety seats needed to sufficiently address the low socio-economic community.
- Continue implementing and developing IDOT's Highway Safety Plan initiatives.
- Utilize NCHRP Report 500 - Volume 11: A Guide for Increasing Seatbelt Use.
- Investigate all recent implemented strategies for success.